

## **ELEMENT 162: RIVERS POLICY AND CLASSIFICATION PLAN**

### **01 INTRODUCTION**

In 1991, the General Assembly passed legislation establishing the Rhode Island Rivers Council. The Council had three basic duties: 1) to develop a rivers classification plan for Rhode Island, 2) to prepare a rivers policy, and 3) to recognize local watershed councils as bodies corporate and politic.

The Rivers Council Act calls for the *Rivers Policy and Classification Plan* to be adopted by the State Planning Council as an element of the State Guide Plan. The State Planning Council approved the Plan on January 8, 1998, as Element 162.

The *Rivers Policy and Classification Plan* is a guide for action to protect and enhance the quality and the use of Rhode Island's freshwater bodies. The Plan is intended to provide clear, integrated, affirmative guidance for the management and protection of Rhode Island's freshwater resources at the state, local, and watershed level. Its broad objectives are to protect drinking water supplies and pristine rivers, to encourage recreational use of rivers, to foster the creation of greenways, and to provide for the clean-up of rivers.

### **02 ISSUES ADDRESSED**

In establishing the Rivers Council, it was declared to be in the public interest to:

- preserve open space, natural resources, and features,
- preserve cultural and historic landscapes and features,
- preserve opportunities for recreational use of rivers,
- encourage the establishment of greenways which link open spaces together, and
- continue the regional and comprehensive planning activities for rivers, water quality, and land use conducted by the Department of Environmental Management and the Department of Administration.

By law, the rivers policies developed by the Rhode Island Rivers Council must:

- be consistent with federal water quality requirements,
- give consideration to existing public and private development, and
- treat rivers as ecological systems.

### **03     POLICIES**

#### **A.     *Land Use***

Policy R-1 Land use shall be managed within watersheds, and especially upstream of drinking water supplies and aquifers, and adjacent to freshwater bodies, in a manner consistent with attaining the freshwater fishable and swimmable goal.

#### **B.     *Nonpoint Sources of Pollution***

Policy R-2 The mitigation and prevention of nonpoint source pollution shall be addressed in accordance with the Rhode Island Nonpoint Source Pollution Management Plan.

#### **C.     *Clean Up and Preservation of the Quality of Rivers***

Policy R-3 Rivers and other freshwater bodies not meeting water quality classification goals shall be improved.

#### **D.     *Public Drinking Water***

Policy R-4 Land use regulation and acquisition shall be used to provide for the protection of public drinking water supply watersheds.

#### **E.     *Recreation***

Policy R-5 Rhode Island's rivers and freshwater bodies are an important recreational asset and shall be managed as such, except in instances when they are drinking water supplies, or habitat for rare or endangered species, that would be harmed by recreational use.

#### **F.     *Preservation of Open Space, Habitat, Natural Resources, and Features***

Policy R-6 In rural and undeveloped watersheds, priority shall be given to protecting large, unfragmented areas.

Policy R-7 In suburban and urban areas, priority shall be given to the preservation of habitat and the establishment of greenways that link natural, historic, and cultural communities and/or provide recreational opportunity.

#### **G.     *Preservation of Cultural and Historic Landscapes and Features***

Policy R-8 The natural, cultural, and historic features of river systems and their adjacent lands shall be preserved and protected to the maximum extent possible.

**H.     *Water Withdrawals (Water Supply Management)***

Policy R-9 Water withdrawals shall be managed comprehensively within individual watersheds in accordance with this plan's classifications.

**I.     *Public Involvement and Local Watershed Councils***

Policy R-10 As a matter of State policy, watershed organizations, citizen and recreational interest groups and associations, and volunteer monitoring programs shall be encouraged and supported.

**J.     *Interstate Coordination***

Policy R-11 As a matter of State policy, the Rivers Council and local watershed councils shall coordinate their activities on a watershed basis across state boundaries, as appropriate.

**04     CLASSIFICATION PLAN**

The plan classifies all of the river segments in the state into five classes: pristine, water supplies, recreational open space, recreational multiple use, and working.